

The Day My Grandpa Forgot Me

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Explanation and Excerpt

When my father died of the effects of Alzheimer's two years ago, we had unfinished stories between us. Some were about the pain of losing a loved one while he is still alive, others about regret. One was simply the uncertain tale of not knowing whether we had done Alzheimer's 'right.'

One result of this wondering has been 'The Day My Grandpa Forgot Me.' It is a true, composite story, 781 words of realistic fiction and most likely of the picture book genre for children and their adults.

Increasingly, young children experience the hard 'non-fiction' of losing beloved elders to illness and the effects of old age. 'The Day My Grandpa Forgot Me' compassionately suggests there is still light, plenty of laughter, potential and love in the heavier, darker moments of disease and pending goodbyes.

My hope is that the story inspires a bit of cheer and a little resolve to make the most of our time with our loves.

~ Heather Burton

Excerpt

The Day My Grandpa Forgot Me

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The day my grandpa forgot me was a day we came visiting. We drove up to his sunny house where daisies line the walk and pink pelicans guard the raspberry bushes from birds.

Grandpa was sitting on the porch in a swing chair like many times before. He wore his fishing cap pushed back, wrinkled me a big smile, and asked, "And who do we have here?"

"Grandpa, it's me, you silly squirrel!" (My code name was Goofy Gopher.)

Grandpa wasn't laughing. He looked at my dad and said, "Ben?"

That isn't my name. It's my dad's. We stood for a second with a breeze between us as a cloud passed over the sun.

"Remember what we talked about?" Dad asked. I knew the time had come.

"Grandpa, I'm Sam, YOUR Sam, and we've come to take you fishing."

On the day my grandpa forgot me, we took the best storyteller in the world to the lake. Grandpa told the old, old tales of when he was a boy in the country, about catching a boot, getting lost in the woods, tipping over outhouses, and eating so much cherry pie it made him sick.

No one loves those stories as much as Grandpa. His laugh was like a bell on the water. I love Grandpa's laugh.

Paddling to the shore, I asked what he wanted to do next.

“I don’t know. What is there to do?”

That was new, too. I thought Grandpa knew everything.

Burton, 2

I looked at my dad who shrugged his shoulders.

“Grandpa, have we got a day for you!”

On the day my grandpa forgot me, we took him to the airport to watch the planes come in. He loved to see them take off and land -- jetliners, cargo planes, and the little ones that only held two people. Long ago, he was a pilot, and planes are like fancy race cars to him. We leaned back on the hood of the car and Grandpa said things like, “Look! A Cessna A-37 Dragonfly – isn’t she a beaut!”

After planes, we went to a big park in the city with a bandstand and a Saturday afternoon concert. Grandpa jiggled and tapped while the ice cream dripped pink from his cone – strawberry, our number one flavor. The trumpet solos were his favourite, he said. “There was nobody like Louis Armstrong.”

“Louis Armstrong, Grandpa?” I asked.

Grandpa lifted his wrinkles high. “Ben, what are you teaching this boy?”

We found a wide, tall tree and spread a quilted blanket in the shade. The three of us settled in for a little snooze, as Grandpa calls it, but mostly I lay awake watching the rise and fall of

Grandpa's checkered chest. Soft snores shuddered as he breathed. Here and there, gray whiskers sprouted from his cheeks, out of his nose, and from his bushy eyebrows. Where the fishing hat fell back, there were just a few long hairs, combed over.

"I used to be a handsome, dog, young Sam...but these, these are WISDOM hairs," is what he once told me. He winked, then, and said, "Wise is even better than handsome." Grandpa's winks were a world of meaning.

It was on the day my grandpa forgot me that I thought he must be the wisest man in the world.

(Continued in the original manuscript.)